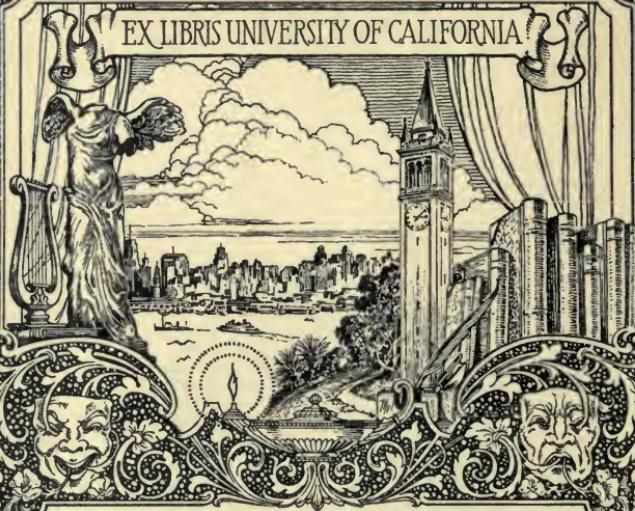




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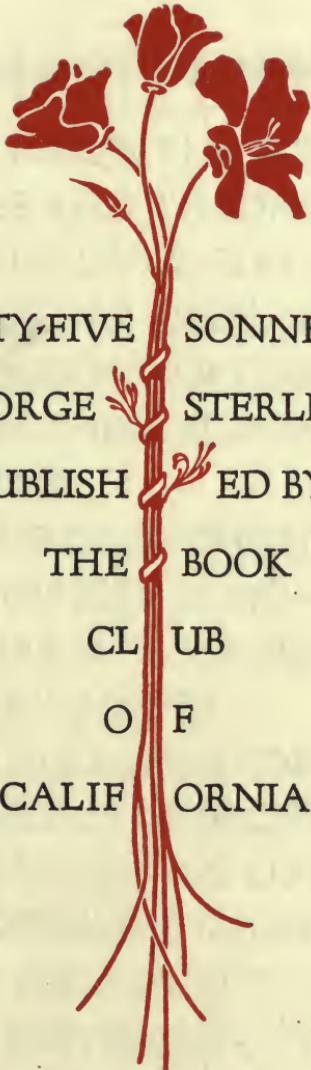




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THIRTY-FIVE SONNETS BY  
GEORGE STERLING  
PUBLISHED BY  
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# IN EXTREMIS

TILL DAWN THE WINDS' IN-  
SUPERABLE THRONG  
PASSED OVER LIKE ARCH-  
ANGELS IN THEIR MIGHT-  
WITH ROAR OF CHARIOTS  
FROM THEIR STORMY  
HEIGHT-  
AND BROKEN THUNDER OF  
MYSTERIOUS SONG-  
BY MARINER OR SENTRY  
HEARD ALONG  
THE STAR-USURPING BAT-  
TLEMENTS OF NIGHT-  
AND WAFTURE OF IM-  
MEASURABLE FLIGHT-  
AND HIGH-BLOWN TRUM-  
PETS MUTINOUS & STRONG.

Till louder on the dreadful dark I heard  
The shrieking of the tempest-tortured tree,  
And deeper on immensity the call  
And tumult of the empire-forging sea;  
But near the eternal Peace I lay, nor stirred,  
Knowing the happy dead hear not at all.

## ROMANCE

Thou passest, and we know thee not, Romance!  
Thy gaze is backward, and thy heart is fed  
With murmurs and with music of the dead.  
Alas, our battle! for the rays that glance  
On thy dethroning sword and haughty lance  
Are of forgotten suns and stars long fled;  
Thou weavest phantom roses for thy head,  
And ghostly queens in thy dominion dance.

Would we might follow thy returning wings,  
And in thy farthest haven beach our prow —  
Thy dragons conquered and thine oceans crossed —  
And find thee standing on the dust of kings,  
A lion at thy side, and on thy brow  
The light of sunsets wonderful and lost!

## A MOOD

I am grown weary of permitted things  
And weary of the care-emburdened age—  
Of any dusty lore of priest and sage  
To which no memory of Arcadia clings;  
For subtly in my blood at evening sings  
A madness of the faun—a choric rage  
That makes all earth and sky seem but a cage  
In which the spirit pines with cheated wings.

Rather by dusk for Lilith would I wait  
And for a moment's rapture welcome death,  
Knowing that I had baffled Time and Fate,  
And feeling on my lips, that died with day  
As sense and soul were gathered to a breath,  
The immortal, deadly lips that kissing slay.

## MEMORY

She stands beside the ocean of the Past,  
A diver. Pearls and hydras can she bring,  
Shells for the child and crystals for the king.  
Prone on her reefs the sea-assaying mast  
And keels that dared the hurricane are cast —  
Trophies of tides invincible that swing  
Around the islands where the sirens sing,  
The magic of whose song is hers at last.

Some shadow of the glory she restores,  
Tho wave and wind devour the Ships of Dream;  
For many mark her ere the fall of night,  
When the surf's sound is mighty on her shores,  
Singing, as wildly on her bosom gleam  
The sea-dews, and the rubies of the light.

## THE BLACK VULTURE

Aloof upon the day's immeasured dome,  
He holds unshared the silence of the sky.  
Far down his bleak, relentless eyes descry  
The eagle's empire and the falcon's home—  
Far down, the galleons of sunset roam;  
His hazards on the sea of morning lie;  
Serene, he hears the broken tempest sigh  
Where cold sierras gleam like scattered foam.

And least of all he holds the human swarm—  
Unwitting now that envious men prepare  
To make their dream and its fulfilment one,  
When, poised above the caldrons of the storm,  
Their hearts, contemptuous of death, shall dare  
His roads between the thunder and the sun.

## THE MUSE OF THE INCOMMUNICABLE

An echo often have our singers caught,  
And they that bend above the saddened strings;  
One hue of all the hundred on her wings  
Our painters render, and our men of thought  
In realms mysterious her face have sought  
And glimpsed its marvel in elusive things.  
Her fragrance gathers and her shadow clings  
To all the loveliness that man hath wrought.

The wind of lonely places is her wine.  
Still she eludes us, hidden, husht and fleet,  
A star withdrawn, a music in the gloom.  
Beauty and death her speechless lips assign,  
Where silence is, and where the surf-loud feet  
Of armies wander on the sands of doom.

## AT THE GRAND CAÑON

Thou settest splendors in my sight, O Lord!  
It seems as tho a deep-hued sunset falls  
Forever on these Cyclopean walls,—  
These battlements where Titan hosts have warred,  
And hewn the world with devastating sword,  
And shook with trumpets the eternal halls  
Where seraphim lay hid by bloody palls  
And only Hell and Silence were adored.

Lo! the abyss wherein great Satan's wings  
Might gender tempests, and his dragons' breath  
Fume up in pestilence. Beneath the sun  
Or starry outposts on terrestrial things,  
Is no such testimony unto Death  
Nor altars builded to Oblivion.

## SONNETS ON OBLIVION

Oblivion

The Dust Dethroned

The Night of Gods

⋮⋮



## OBLIVION

Her eyes have seen the monoliths of kings  
Upcast like foam of the effacing tide;  
She hath beheld the desert stars deride  
The monuments of Power's imaginings;  
About their base the wind Assyrian flings  
The dust that throned the satrap in his pride;  
Cambyses and the Memphian pomps abide  
As in the flame the moth's presumptuous wings.

There gleams no glory that her hand shall spare,  
Nor any sun whose rays shall cross her night,  
Whose realm enfolds man's empire and its end.  
No armor of renown her sword shall dare,  
No council of the gods withstand her might:  
Stricken at last Time's lonely Titans bend.

## THE DUST DETHRONED

Sargon is dust, Semiramis a clod!  
In crypts profaned the moon at midnight peers;  
The owl upon the Sphinx hoots in her ears,  
And scant and sear the desert grasses nod  
Where once the armies of Assyria trod,  
With younger sunlight splendid on the spears;  
The lichens cling the closer with the years,  
And seal the eyelids of the weary god.

Where high the tombs of royal Egypt heave,  
The vulture shadows with arrested wings  
The indecipherable boasts of kings,  
As Arab children hear their mother's cry  
And leave in mockery their toy — they leave  
The skull of Pharaoh staring at the sky.

## THE NIGHT OF GODS

Their mouths have drunken the eternal wine—  
The draught that Baäl in oblivion sips.  
Unseen about their courts the adder slips,  
Unheard the sucklings of the leopard whine;  
The toad has found a resting-place divine  
And bloats in stupor between Ammon's lips.  
O Carthage and the unreturning ships,  
The fallen pinnacle, the shifting Sign!

Lo! when I hear from voiceless court and fane  
Time's adoration of Eternity—  
The cry of kingdoms past and gods undone—  
I stand as one whose feet at noontide gain  
A lonely shore; who feels his soul set free,  
And hears the blind sea chanting to the sun.



SONNETS ON SLEEP

I, II, III



# I

Upon the skies of slumber dreams have flight,  
And one from gentlest dreams may wake to weep.  
The dark has moons to sway its utmost deep,  
And stars that touch the sleeper from their height.  
Ere long, tho' mute and liberative Night  
Thy soul and sorrow in her poppy steep,  
Her flowers the sickle of the dawn shall reap,  
In melancholy meadows of the light.

In vain are Lethe's dews upon the brow,  
Except one find them on its farther shore;  
And he alone has enviable rest  
Who sought for peace through many tears, and now  
Whose answered heart a rose is richer for,  
In some old graveyard where the robins nest.

## II

Life holds a different pact with every man,  
Tho to one sea her many streams descend.  
To some she stands a foe, to some a friend,  
Devising each her benison or ban;  
And one is saint, and one is courtesan;  
One labors, one is idle to the end.  
Of all her children none shall comprehend  
Whether she strive in madness or with plan.

But Death has one condition for us all,  
And he that in the pyramid's deep core  
Lies with the graven adamant for pall,  
In no profounder pit of silence sleeps  
Than he who has his grave by some low shore  
To which the thunder-bosomed ocean sweeps.

### III

Death has the final answer to our cry,  
And past our portals of unrest awaits  
Responsive to our question of the Fates;  
And he who would attain that deep reply  
Must seal his ears to other sounds, and die.  
What wonder, if before the midnight gates  
The searcher of the riddle hesitates,  
Uncertain what those ashen lips deny?

What if the hearer with the pleader cease,  
And thus the timeless answer come unheard?  
So he that sought for truth should find it peace,  
In those long silences where none could hark  
The mighty, indecipherable Word  
That fell unfathomed on the eternal dark.



## THE THIRST OF SATAN

In dream I saw the starry disarray  
(That battle-dust of matter's endless war)  
Astir with some huge passing, and afar  
Beheld the troubled constellations sway  
In winds of insurrection and dismay,  
Till, from that magnitude whose ages are  
But moments in the cycle of the star,  
There swept a Shadow on our ghost of day—

A Shape that clutched the deviating earth  
And checked its headlong flight and held it fast,  
Draining the bitter oceans one by one.  
Then, to the laughter of infernal mirth,  
The ruined chalice droned athwart the Vast,  
Hurled in the face of the offended sun.

## RESPITE

Noon has her drowsy kingdom in the sky.  
The valley holds forever, like a shell,  
An ocean murmur, and about my dell  
The pines wait dreaming, too content to sigh.  
Silence has half her will, nor would I try  
Another's: here a waif unsought I dwell  
On whom a rainbow-land has laid her spell,—  
In whom recorded memories fade or die.

Linger, O day! for at thy heart is peace;  
Thine azure holds no question; ere thou cease,  
To be and to be glad is to have done.  
Pause in the breathless temple of thy noon,  
Ere yet I drink enchantment from the moon  
And watch love's star above the sunken sun!

## THAT WALK IN DARKNESS

Not when the sun is captain of the skies,  
Nor when the sapphire-dwelling moon divine  
Arrows with light the battlements of pine,  
Roams Lilith, she whom raptures have made wise;  
But one shall see her with enchanted eyes  
When starlight makes mysterious her shrine,  
That whoso drinks her beauty's golden wine  
Shall lose his hope and need of Paradise.

And tho the cruel vision smite him blind,  
Yet more than they who mourn him is he whole  
On whom her sorceries have burst in flood,—  
To whom her lips are offered, that he find  
Her kiss a consternation to the soul  
And scarlet trumpets pealing in the blood.

## INDIAN SUMMER

Come with me to some woodland where the chill  
Of autumn stirs with ecstasy the day,  
Or where the tranquil edges of a bay  
Shoal to untroubled turquoise, pure and still;  
There let immortal Beauty have her will  
In that hushed temple of the year's delay,  
Crowning thy heavens with her holy ray,  
While the heart leaps and eyes unbidden fill.

Assent thou not unto the year's "Alas!"  
Tho all that is depart and leave no trace.  
Suffice it, ere the lonely vision pass,  
That Loveliness be given for a space,  
When, set with stars, the soul's deep waters glass  
The glory and the sorrow of her face.

TO THE MUMMY OF THE LADY ISIS  
IN THE BOHEMIAN CLUB

No bird shall tell thee of the seasons' flight:  
Sealed are thine ears that now no longer list.  
The little veins of temple and of wrist  
Are food no more for sleepless love's delight,  
And crumbling in the sessions of thy night,  
Pylon and sphinx shall be as fleeting mist.  
Bitter with natron are the lips that kissed,  
And shorn of dreams the spirit and the sight.

Ah! dust misused! better to feed the flow'r,  
Than grace the revels of an alien hour,  
When babe or lord wake never to caress  
The bosom where unerring Death hath struck  
And milkless breasts that give the ages suck —  
Stilled in the slumber that is nothingness.



SONNETS ON THE SEA'S VOICE

I, II, III, IV



## I

Thou seem'st to call to that which will not hear,  
As man to Fate. Thine anthems uncontrolled,  
From winnowed sands and reefs reverberant rolled,  
Shake as with sorrow, and the hour is near  
Wherein thy voice shall seem a thing of fear,  
Like to a lion's at the trembling fold;  
And men shall waken to the midnight cold,  
And feel that dawn is far, that night is drear.

Thou wert ere Life, a dim but quenchless spark,  
Found vesture in thy vastness. Thou shalt be  
When Life hath crossed the threshold of the Dark,—  
When shackling ice hath zoned at last thy breast,  
And thy deep voice is hushed, O vanquished Sea!  
One with eternity that giveth rest.

II

No cloud is on the heavens, and on the sea  
No sail: the immortal, solemn ocean lies  
Unbroken sapphire to the walling skies—  
Immutable, supreme in majesty.  
The billows, where the charging foam leaps free,  
Burden the winds with thunder. Soul, arise!  
For ghostly trumpet-blasts and battle-cries  
Across the tumult wake the Past for thee.

They call me to a dim, disastrous land,  
Where fallen marbles tell of mighty years,  
Heroic architraves, but where the gust  
Ripples forsaken waters. Lo! I stand  
With armies round about, and in mine ears  
The roar of harps reborn from legend's dust.

### III

How very still this odorous, dim space  
Amid the pines! The light is reverent,  
Pausing as one who stands with meek intent  
On thresholds of an everlasting place.  
A single iris waits in weary grace—  
Her countenance before the dawning bent,  
As Faith might linger, husht and innocent,  
With all an altar's glory on her face.

But silence now is hateful: I would be,  
By midnight dark and wild as Satan's soul,  
Where the winds' unreturning charioteers  
Lash, with the hurtling scourges of the sea,  
Their frantic steeds to some tempestuous goal—  
The deep's enormous music in their ears.

## IV

O thou unalterable sea! how vast  
Thine utterance! What portent in thy tone,  
As here thy giant choirs, august, alone,  
Roll forth their diapason to the blast!—  
Great waters hurled and broken and upcast  
In timeless splendour and immeasured moan,  
As tho Eternity to years unknown  
Bore witness of the sorrows of the Past.

Thou callest to a deep within my soul—  
Untraversed and unsounded; at thy voice  
Abysses move with phantoms unbegot.  
What paeans haunt me and what pangs control!—  
Thunders wherewith the seraphim rejoice,  
And mighty hunger for I know not what.

# THE SKULL OF SHAKESPEARE

I, II



I

Without how small, within how strangely vast!  
What stars of terror had their path in thee!  
What music of the heavens and the sea  
Lived in a sigh or thundered on the blast!  
Here swept the gleam and pageant of the past,  
As Beauty trembled to her fate's decree;  
Here swords were forged for armies yet to be,  
And tears were found too dreadful not to last.

Here stood the seats of judgment and its light  
To whose assizes all our dreams were led—  
Our best and worst, our Paradise and Hell;  
And in this room delivered now to night,  
The mortal put its question to the dead,  
And worlds were weighed, and God's deep shadow fell.

## II

Here an immortal river had its rise,  
Tho dusty now the fountain whence it ran  
So swift and beautiful with good to man.  
Here the foundation of an empire lies—  
The ruins of a realm seen not with eyes,  
That now the vision of a gnat could scan.  
Here wars were fought within a little span,  
Whose echoes yet resound on human skies.

Life, on her rainbow road from dust to dust,  
Spilt here her wildest iris, still thine own,  
Master, and with thy soul and ashes one!  
Thy wings are distant from our years of lust,  
Yet he who liveth not by bread alone  
Shall see thee as that angel in the sun.

## SONNETS OF THE NIGHT SKIES

Aldebaran at Dusk

The Chariots of Dawn

The Huntress of Stars



## ALDEBARAN AT DUSK

Thou art the star for which all evening waits—  
O star of peace, come tenderly and soon!  
Nor heed the drowsy and enchanted moon,  
Who dreams in silver at the eastern gates  
Ere yet she brim with light the blue estates  
Abandoned by the eagles of the noon;  
But shine thou swiftly on the darkling dune  
And woodlands where the twilight hesitates.

Above that wide and ruby lake to West  
Wherein the sunset waits reluctantly,  
Stir silently the purple wings of Night.  
She stands afar, upholding to her breast,  
As mighty murmurs reach her from the sea,  
Thy lone and everlasting rose of light.

## THE CHARIOTS OF DAWN

O Night, is this indeed the morning-star,  
That now with brandished and impatient beam  
On eastern heights of darkness flames supreme,  
Or some great captain of the dawn, whose car  
Scornful of all thy rear-guard ranks that bar  
His battle, how foreruns the helms that gleam  
Below horizons of dissevering dream,  
Who lifts his javelin to his hosts afar?

Now am I minded of some ocean-king  
That in a war of gods has wielded arms,  
And still in slumber hears their harness ring  
And dreams of isles where golden altars fume,  
Till, mad for irretrievable alarms,  
He passes down the seas to some strange doom.

## THE HUNTRESS OF STARS

Tell me, O Night! what horses hale the moon!  
Those of the sun rear now on Syria's day,  
But here the steeds of Artemis delay  
At heavenly rivers hidden from the moon,  
Or quench their starry thirst at cisterns hewn  
In midnight's deepest sapphire, ere she slay  
The Bull, and hide the Pleiades' dismay,  
Or drown Orion in a silver swoon.

Are those the stars, and not their furious eyes,  
That now before her coming chariot glare?  
Is that their nebulous, phantasmal breath  
Trailed like a mist upon the winter skies,  
Or vapors from a Titan's pyre of death—  
Far-wafted on the orbit of Altair?



## THE COMING SINGER

The Veil before the mystery of things  
Shall stir for him with iris and with light;  
Chaos shall have no terror in his sight  
Nor earth a bond to chafe his urgent wings;  
With sandals beaten from the crowns of kings  
Shall he tread down the altars of their night,  
And stand with Silence on her breathless height,  
To hear what song the star of morning sings.

With perished beauty in his hands as clay,  
Shall he restore futurity its dream.  
Behold! his feet shall take a heavenly way  
Of chorric silver and of chanting fire,  
Till in his hands unshapen planets gleam,  
'Mid murmurs from the Lion and the Lyre.

TO MARGARET ANGLIN  
IN THE GREEK TRAGEDIES

She has heard mighty music from the Past,  
And deathless trumpets from oblivion,  
And she has seen the blood of heroes run  
To stain the morning of a day forecast.  
How high, O Art, the ministry thou hast!  
Behold! the magic of thy chosen one  
Has called their shades from Lethe to the sun,  
And ghosts of gods from heavens that could not last.

Black on the arras of the years that were,  
What shadows of immortal armies stir!  
The stars conspire, and groping by their light,  
Man seeks for joy and peace, nor knows what loom,  
Tireless by dusk or noon or deep of night,  
Runs scarlet with the fabric of his doom.

## TO ONE SELF-SLAIN

The door thou chosest, gave it on the night?  
Ever we ask of whoso openeth  
If day or darkness hold the seats of Death;  
But if the heavy-lidded dead have sight  
Their mouths are loyal to that alien light:  
Amid the Innumerable no one saith  
What waited on the passing of the breath—  
Spend not your own: the grave will not requite.

Phantoms and whispers reach us from the dark—  
Mirages vain, mendacities august  
That are but of the living, not the dead.  
Nay! tho I hunger, I in no wise hark  
The fleeting music scattered with thy dust,  
Nor call thy shadow from the House of Dread.

## KINDRED

Musing, between the sunset and the dark,  
As Twilight in unhesitating hands  
Bore from the faint horizon's underlands,  
Silvern and chill, the moon's phantasmal ark,  
I heard the sea, and far away could mark  
Where that unalterable waste expands  
In sevenfold sapphire from the mournful sands,  
And saw beyond the deep a vibrant spark.

There sank the sun Arcturus, and I thought:  
Star, by an ocean on a world of thine,  
May not a being, born, like me, to die,  
Confront a little the eternal Naught  
And watch our isolated sun decline—  
Sad for his evanescence, even as I?

OMNIA EXEUNT IN MYSTERIUM

I , II , III



# I

The stranger in my gates—lo! that am I,  
And what my land of birth I do not know,  
Nor yet the hidden land to which I go.  
One may be lord of many ere he die,  
And tell of many sorrows in one sigh,  
But know himself he shall not, nor his woe,  
Nor to what sea the tears of wisdom flow,  
Nor why one star is taken from the sky.

An urging is upon him evermore,  
And tho he bide, his soul is wanderer,  
Scanning the shadows with a sense of haste  
Where fade the tracks of all who went before—  
A dim and solitary traveller  
On ways that end in evening and the waste.

II

How dumb the vanished billions who have died!  
With backward gaze conjectural we wait,  
And ere the invading Shadow penetrate,  
The echo from a mighty heart that cried  
Is made a soul memorial to pride.  
From out that night's inscrutable estate  
A few cold voices wander, desolate  
With all that love has lost or grief has sighed.

Slaves, seamen, captains, councillors and kings,  
Gone utterly, save for those echoes far!  
As they before, I tread a forfeit land,  
Till the supreme and ancient silence flings  
Its pall between the dreamer and the star.  
O desert wide! O little grain of sand!

### III

As one that knew not of the sea might come  
From slender sources of a mountain stream,  
And, wending where the sandy shallows gleam  
And boulder-strewn the stumbling waters hum  
And white with haste the falling torrents drum,  
Might stand in darkness at the land's extreme  
And stare in doubt, where, ghostly and supreme,  
Muffled in mist and night, the sea lay dumb,—

So shalt thou follow life, a downward rill  
A-babble as with question and surmise,  
To wait at last where no star beaconeth,  
And find the midnight desolate and chill,  
And face below its indecisive skies  
The Consummation, mystery and death.

## TO LIFE

Witch and enchantress, I have watched you feed  
Your children from your cup of poison brew;  
Subtly you mix the venom and the dew,  
That, drunken, all may follow where you lead,  
Thinking a far mirage their nearer need,  
Whose phantom gardens brighten on the view,  
Where compensating waters may renew  
The hearts that thirst, the failing feet that bleed.

Such is the power of your deluding wine  
I dream I know its magic and design,  
Saying, "So far, no farther, will I sip,  
Ere the draft grow too bitter." Shall there be  
But deepening illusion for the lip,  
And in the dregs a mightier sorcery?



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